

4.7 AESTHETICS

This chapter addresses aesthetic issues related to implementation of the Proposed Project. The environmental setting documents the existing visual characteristics of the project site and vicinity. Sensitive receptors and key observation points are identified. Standards to judge visual sensitivity are presented, and relevant scenic resources plans and policies are reviewed. The evaluation addresses potential effects of the Proposed Project on the visual quality of the site vicinity and analyzes the Proposed Project's support of applicable goals or policies of local planning documents.

4.7.1 Environmental Setting

4.7.1.1 Visual Character of the Project Site and Vicinity

The project area lies off the Santa Barbara County coast in an area characterized by coastal bluffs and sandy beaches. In addition to extensive open space areas along the coast, residential and recreational areas occupy nearby portions of the coast. Generally visible marine habitats in the project area include sandy, rocky, and cobble beaches, and kelp forests. The vast expanse of the Santa Barbara Channel dominates the region's coastal viewshed.

A flat, sandy beach lines the coast between the project site and upland areas. A steep coastal bluff separates the beach from these upland areas, abruptly rising 80 to 100 feet (24.4m to 30.48m) above the beach in some areas. Portions of these upland areas are developed, although the majority of the area is considered open space according to the County of Santa Barbara Comprehensive Plan Open Space Element (Santa Barbara County 1991). Numerous public and private coastal accesses, parks and beaches punctuate the residential and commercial developments along the coastline, interjecting patches of vegetation and open space into this suburban landscape. The Sandpiper Golf Course occupies the coastal terrace directly north of the project site. In addition, the Santa Barbara Shores County Park occupies a substantial portion of the coastal terrace, located adjacent to the eastern boundary of the golf course. This park is largely undeveloped and, along with the golf course and beach, represents open space. The coastline both northeast and northwest of the project site retains a largely rural atmosphere with some residential and commercial developments within the city of Goleta, and commercial onshore oil facilities, e.g. Ellwood Onshore Facility.

Views of the project site consist of a largely unbroken expanse of ocean, with the exception of several offshore oil platforms to the southeast and southwest, and the existing PRC-421 Pier remnant. The view is demarcated by the Channel Islands to the south. Ships, fishing boats, and recreational boats occasionally pass through the viewshed.

4.7.1.2 Visual Sensitivity

Visual sensitivity is typically characterized as high, moderate, or low, and measures a group's concern for the visual environment. Certain populations are typically considered more sensitive to visual change than others, e.g., homeowners versus employees at an industrial site. Although distinct sensitive receptors are determined on a project-specific basis, certain general

characteristics determine the sensitivity of particular receptors. Key Observation Points (KOPs) indicate locations deemed particularly representative of Project-specific sensitive receptors' views. The following paragraphs outline the sensitive receptors and KOPs pertinent to the Proposed Project.

Sensitive Receptors. Receptors ordinarily considered most sensitive to visual change include local residents, recreationists, and people using scenic roadways and view corridors. Such receptors are also generally presumed sensitive to locally increased amounts of light and glare, such as from vessels operating offshore at the project site. The receptor's sensitivity depends upon a variety of factors. Local residents are considered sensitive due to the duration of their exposure to any change, their familiarity with the existing landscape, and their ability to detect change. Scenic quality also carries importance to recreational users enjoying beach- and ocean-dependent activities. People using scenic corridors are considered sensitive because these routes or views have been identified as areas of outstanding scenic quality. Commuters and other travelers on area roadways are presumed to have moderate concern, as the views are of secondary importance to the primary purpose of their presence. Receptors considered most sensitive to Project-related visual effects are described in the following paragraphs.

Local Residents and Commercial Developments. Much of Santa Barbara County's coast has experienced residential development. Residents along the bluffs and coastal areas are considered sensitive visual receptors, as many of them would have views of Project construction activities. While much of the coastal area would experience views of the Project construction activities, the majority of local residents who could potentially see the project site are located to the northeast, along the western extent of the city of Goleta. Land uses include residences, hotels, motels, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, libraries, and churches; many of which are within 2 miles (3.2 km) of the project site. The two closest residential neighborhoods east of the area are both set back from the bluffs and the project site cannot be seen from anywhere within these residential areas due to topography and vegetation. The Sandpiper Golf Course is located northeast of the project area and the southern portion of the course sits atop of the bluffs with full view of the ocean below. The project site is in the viewshed from many locations within the golf course due to the extensively open landscape, lack of dense vegetation, and location on the edge of the bluffs. In areas to the northwest of the project site, residential occupancies are sparse. This area is largely open space, or occupied by commercial developments such as oil production facilities and the Bacara Resort. The Resort is a 360-room hotel that was constructed in 2000. It covers 78 beachfront acres located approximately 1 mile (1.6 km) northwest of PRC-421. The PRC-421 Pier is clearly visible from many locations within the Resort. People vacationing at the Resort during the Project activities are considered highly sensitive receptors to Project related visual change due to the customer demand for quality ocean views from the Resort. The Resort and the Sandpiper Golf Course are the two primarily affected facilities. With their properties bordering the coast immediately shoreward of the Project location, the entire project site is in full view from many locations on these two properties. People using these recreational facilities are considered sensitive receptors to Project activities and visual change in the area.

Recreation Users. Much of the recreation activity in the Project vicinity centers on beach and ocean resources. According to the Open Space Design Concept of the Santa

Barbara County Comprehensive Plan (Santa Barbara County 1991), the coastline in the vicinity of the project area has been categorized as Open Space for Outdoor Recreation. Thirteen parks and recreational facilities from Goleta to El Capitan account for over 400 acres of permanently preserved open space. An undeveloped area, located Southeast of the project site, contains a number of undeveloped trails, which are used by residents for walking and jogging. Much of the area has full ocean view, including the project site. The Santa Barbara County Shores Park is located northeast of the project area and consists of open space available for recreation use. The park is set back from the bluffs and is surrounded by Eucalyptus groves; consequently, the project site is not visible from any location within the park. Several beach access trails/roads are located along the coastline in the vicinity of the project area, including one from the Santa Barbara Shores County Park and one at the Resort.

Santa Barbara Harbor includes approximately 1,160 boat slips and several excursion boat businesses for sportfishing and whale watching in the area. The Santa Barbara Channel has become a major center for whale watching, which typically occurs from February to April and from July to September (Santa Barbara Conference and Visitors Bureau and Film Commission 1999). While pier removal Project activities have been scheduled to avoid whale migration season (November 30 through June 1), some whale watching activity, involving viewing of blue whales feeding near the Channel Islands, extends into September; additionally, general recreational boaters may traverse the area.

Scenic Routes. The Santa Barbara County General Plan of Scenic Highways has not designated any official scenic roadway corridors in the immediate Project vicinity. However, the portion of State Highway 101, throughout its entire length within Santa Barbara County, is eligible for designation as a "Scenic Highway". In addition, Caltrans has also identified this portion of U.S. 101 as eligible for designation as a State scenic highway, according to its *Guidelines for the Official Designation of Scenic Highways* (Caltrans 1999). Due to the far-reaching nature of the coastal vistas, the view corridors (area visible from the road) of this highway may include the Proposed Project site within their background views.

A Southern Pacific railroad parallels the project area coastline. Amtrak intercity passenger trains utilize this line daily. Travelers on U.S. 101 and passengers on the Amtrak trains are considered sensitive to activities in the project area.

Key Observation Points. Five Key Observation Points (KOPs) have been selected to reflect representative viewing conditions and viewer types associated with the local sensitive receptors discussed above. KOPs were determined during project area field visits on May 23 and 24, 2001. However, some of the photographs presented in this EIR section were taken during a field trip on September 25, 2003. These KOPs incorporate a variety of sites, including public lands and associated recreation uses, as well as commercial developments with the project site in their viewshed. Because of the project site's distance from the coastline, all of the KOPs are more than 400 feet (121.9m) from the Proposed Project site.

Locations of the KOPs are depicted on Figure 4.7-1, and are described below.

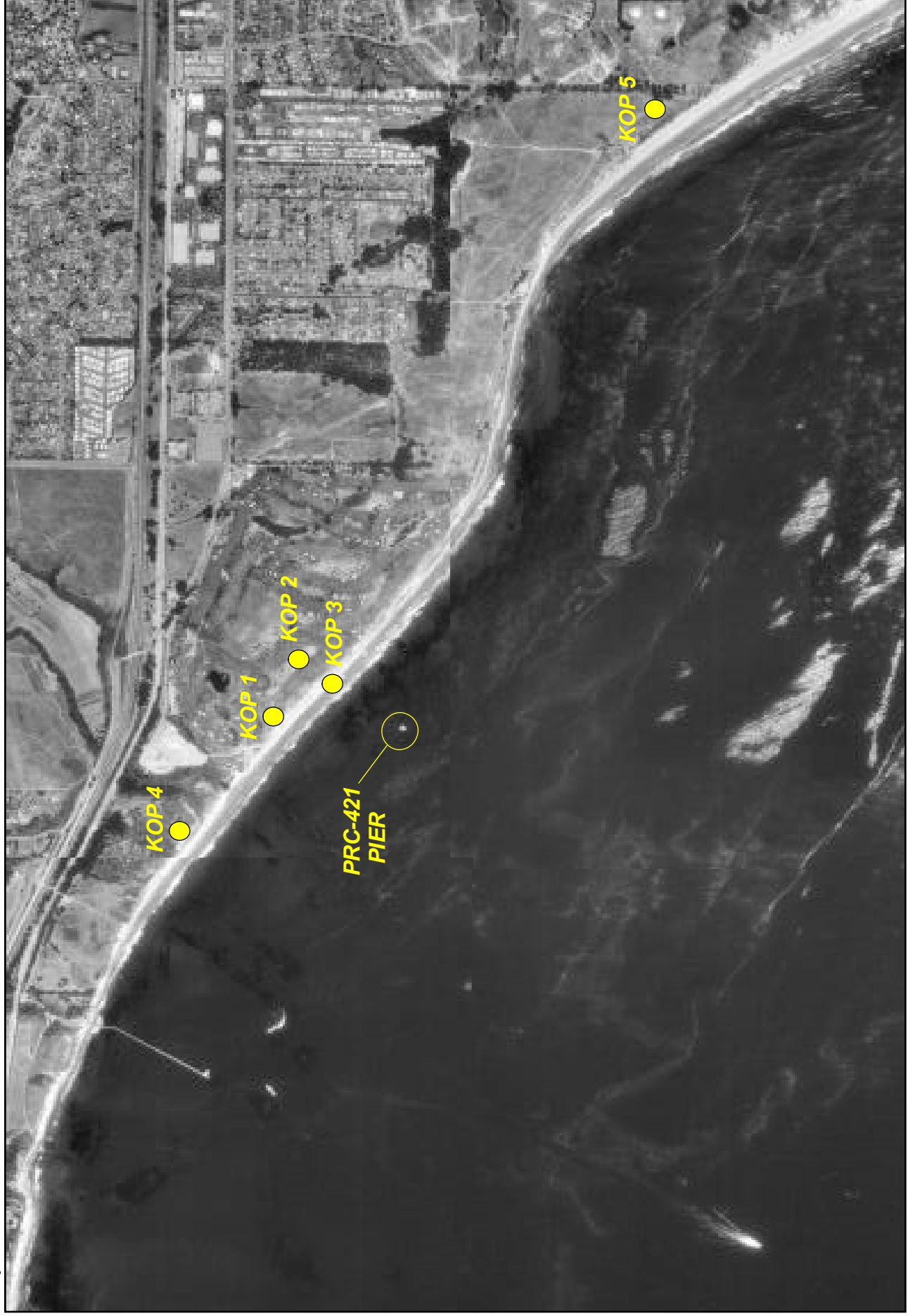
- **KOP No. 1** presents the view southward toward the project site from the 13th tee at the Sandpiper Golf Course. This KOP is representative of the view of the project site from the majority of the southwest end of the public golf course (Figure 4.7-2A).
- **KOP No. 2** presents the view southwesterly toward the project site from the 13th fairway at the Sandpiper Golf Course. This location is the closest to PRC-421 from within the golf course (Figure 4.7-2B).
- **KOP No. 3** presents the view southwesterly toward the project site from Haskell's Beach. This KOP is located directly onshore from PRC-421 and directly below the Sandpiper Golf Course (Figure 4.7-2C).
- **KOP No. 4** presents the view southeasterly toward the project site from the beach access trail to the Bacara Resort. This KOP is representative of the viewshed from much of the Bacara Property (Figure 4.7-2D).
- **KOP No. 5** presents the view northwesterly toward the project site from a trail on the cliff edge above Ellwood Beach. This is one of many trails utilized by joggers in an undeveloped area southeast of the Santa Barbara Shores County Park. This KOP is also the furthest north on the Cliffside trail from which the site is fully visible. The site is no longer visible from a location approximately 150 feet (45.7m) further north of KPP No. 5 (Figure 4.7-2E). This KOP represents all Cliffside views of the project area from this point south to Coal Oil Point. Any areas beyond Coal Oil Point do not have visibility of the project area due to blockage by Coal Oil Point.

4.7.1.3 Applicable Plans, Goals, and Policies

Local visual quality goals, objectives, and policies applicable to the Proposed Project address three issues: public view corridors; eligible (but not official) scenic roadways; and the protection of the area's visual character and aesthetic resources. Scenic resources in the Project vicinity are discussed in the *Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan*, Open Space Element, Land Use Element, and Scenic Highways Element, and in the *Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan*. The city of Goleta is in the process of developing its General Plan. Background reports exist, but no policy documents as yet. Relevant guidance from these plans is summarized below.

Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan

Policies in the *Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan*, *Open Space Element*, require preservation of open space and scenic resources in accordance to Section 65561 of the California Code of Regulations, which states: "preservation of open space is necessary not only for the maintenance of the economy of the State, but also for the assurance of the continued availability of land for the production of food and fiber, for the enjoyment of scenic beauty, for recreation, and for the use of natural resources" (Santa Barbara County 1991).

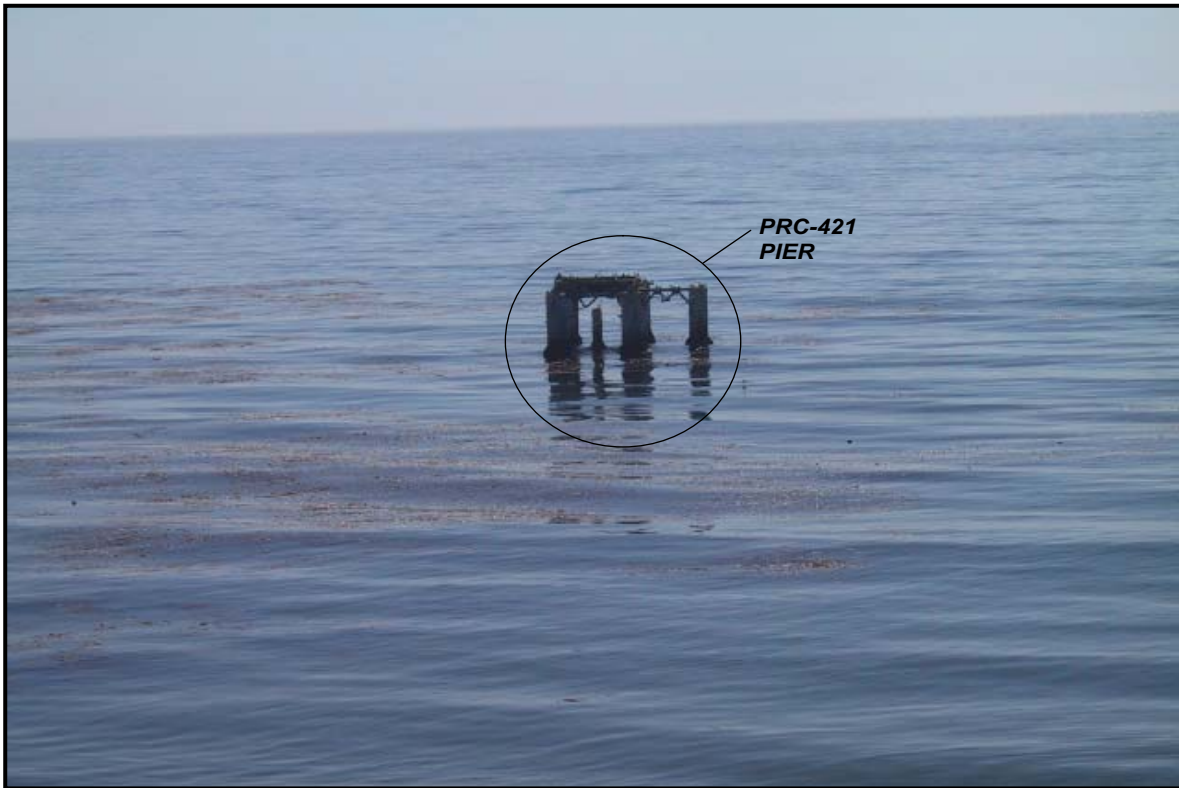


KEY OBSERVATION POINT LOCATIONS
FIGURE 4.7-1

Backside of 4.7-1

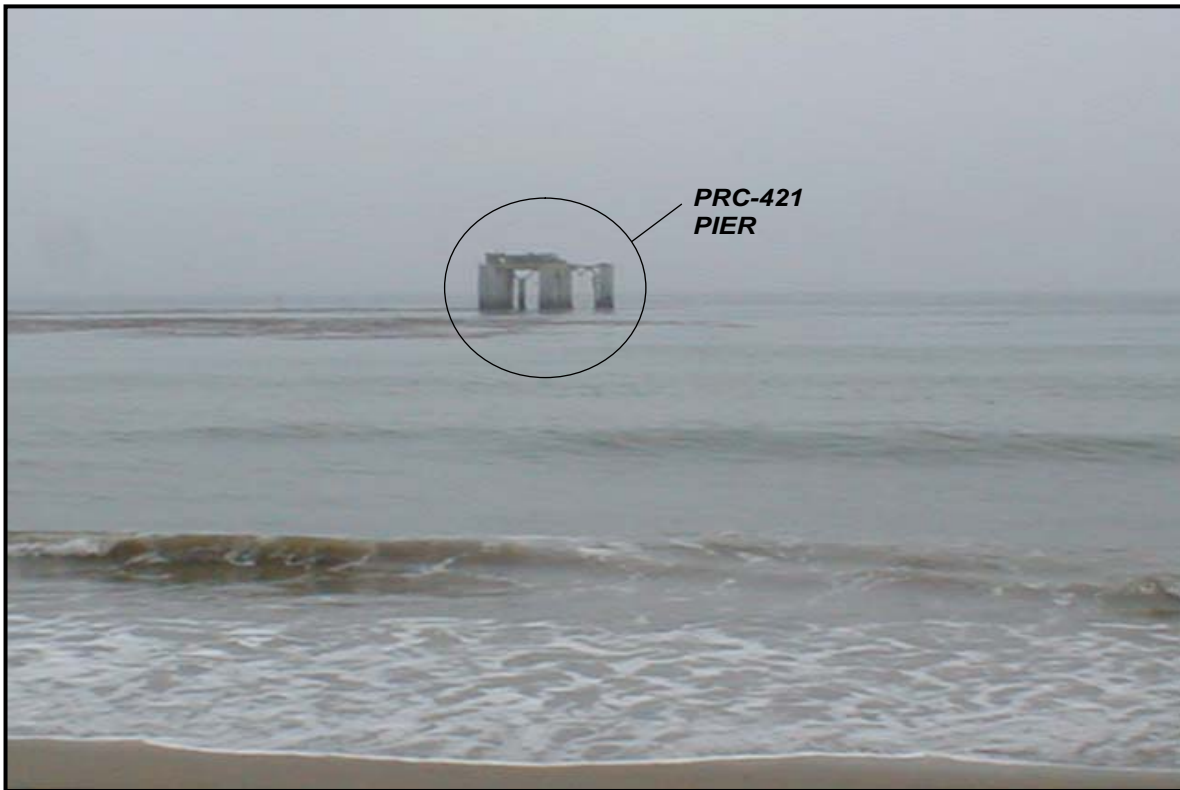


A . KOP No.1 - View Toward Project Site from the 13th Tee at the Sandpiper Golf Course. Pier approximately 1500 feet south.



B . KOP No.2 - View Toward Project Site from the 13th Fairway at the Sandpiper Golf Course. Pier approximately 1000 feet southwest.

Backside of 4.7-2 A&B



C. KOP No. 3 - View Toward Project Site from Haskell's Beach, Directly Onshore from PRC-421. Pier approximately 850 feet southwest.



D. KOP No. 4 - View Toward Project Site from Beach Access Path to the Bacara Resort. Pier approximately 3700 feet southwest.

Backside of 4.7-2 C&D



E . KOP No. 5 - View Toward Project Site from Trail Along Cliff Edge above Ellwood Beach. Trail is within the Undeveloped Area Southwest of Santa Barbara County Shores Park. Pier is approximately 7500 feet northwest.

Backside of 4.7-2E

The *Land Use Element* of the *Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan* states in its policies that: “in areas designated as rural on the land use plan maps, the height, scale, and design of the structures shall be compatible with the character of the surrounding natural environment, except where technical requirements dictate otherwise” (Santa Barbara County 1992).

As indicated above, the *Scenic Highways Element* of the *Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan* identifies no highways other than U.S. 101 near the project site as official Scenic Highways. Therefore, no Scenic Highways are located in the immediate Project vicinity.

Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan

The *Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan* serves as the California Coastal Commission (CCC) - certified Local Coastal Plan for Santa Barbara County. As such, the Plan incorporates a combination of goals and policies derived from the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (CZMA) and the California Coastal Act of 1976. These goals and policies provide guidance for the management of aesthetic resources in the County’s coastal zone, and address both onshore and offshore aspects of those resources.

Policies in the *Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan* call for the protection of scenic coastal areas in accordance with Section 30251 of the CZMA, which states: “*Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, and where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas*” (Santa Barbara County 1995c).

4.7.2 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.7.2.1 Methodology

The potential visual impacts created by the Proposed Project were evaluated by assessing the Project’s visibility from the five KOPs. Total visual impact was judged on the change in landscape compatibility, scale, contrast, and spatial dominance of the Proposed Project over existing conditions. Because visual impacts are subjective, individual sensitivity or responses will vary. However, certain issues tend to hold for most viewers. First, visual impact depends on the size and proximity (scale and spatial dominance) of the object. Second, the similarity or compatibility of an object with the existing viewshed is a factor. Third, the contrast of an object influences response, such that objects that blend into the view are considered less intrusive than those that are very visible. This issue includes light and glare, intensity of illumination, etc.

4.7.2.2 Significance Criteria

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, and for the purposes of this analysis, impacts are considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Project would:

- affect a scenic vista or scenic highway;

- have a demonstrable negative aesthetic effect; or
- create light or glare.

Policy direction of applicable local planning documents was considered in determining the significance of these impacts.

4.7.2.3 Aesthetic Impacts

Short-term Impacts. The following are the potential impacts of Project implementation occurring during the demolition, recovery and installation phases of the Proposed Project.

VIS-1: Pier removal and roosting/nesting platform construction activities would result in short-term visual impacts.

Discussion:

Project activities may create a moderate to high degree of visual sensitivity for occupants of nearby residences and view corridors, as well for recreational users of the project area coastline and of U.S. 101, which is eligible for future designation as a Scenic Highway. Consequently, a variety of sensitive receptors, including travelers on nearby U.S. 101, residents and recreationists, could observe the pier removal and platform construction activities. The two main facilities that are considered sensitive receptors with a full view of the project activities include the Bacara Resort located northwest of the project site, and the Sandpiper Golf Course located northeast of the project site. In addition, many recreationists using the beach and trails to the southeast of the project site will have project activities within view. The sensitive receptors are primarily located on land that is higher than the project site, so the view is looking down and out toward the sea.

The pier remnants are 850 feet (259.08m) from the shore; therefore, the distance along with downward views tend to reduce the perceived scale of the magnitude of the Proposed Project and the equipment involved. In addition, dense haze or fog often engulfs the coastal area near the project site. Under foggy weather conditions, the pier cannot be seen from shore; therefore, fog may help reduce the visual impact of the Project activities on local sensitive receptors when such conditions are present. The area's existing mixture of man-made and natural visual attributes accommodates some degree of change. There are currently many types of boats and equipment traveling offshore, and there are several offshore and onshore oil production facilities that occupy the viewshed in the project area.

As noted earlier, the Proposed Project is scheduled to avoid whale migration season; however, Project activities during the month of September may be visible to recreationists on Blue whale watching tours going out toward the Channel Islands. Due to the timing of the Project, whale-watching activities in the Santa Barbara Channel will be minimally affected as most of the whale watching tour season will be avoided. Other recreational boaters will also have views of the pier removal and platform construction activities.

Thus, the presence of vessels for the Proposed Project and the implementation of Project work activities at approximately 400 to 900 feet (121.9 m to 274.3 m) offshore will result in a short-term adverse impact on visual quality during the estimated 26 day construction period due to the perceived incompatibility of construction activities in a natural beach setting from the KOPs. Additionally, navigational and hazard lighting aboard moored barges and vessels will be required during the removal operations, which will increase night lighting at the site and increase the contrast between the normal ocean setting and the construction activities.

Impact/Mitigation:

Because of the short-term duration of the Proposed Project and the limited number of viewers, the Proposed Project will result in an adverse, but not significant impact on the visual environment (Class 3).

Mitigation Measure VIS-1:

Although the impact on the visual environment is not significant, the following is recommended.

- The project proponent shall conduct an educational outreach program to inform the public about the project and the construction activities. This would include notifying the media, commercial facilities, and residents in the area about the type and duration of construction activities a month prior to beginning pier removal activities. Temporary notices would also be posted along the shore at all nearby beach accesses.

Long-term Impacts. The following are the potential impacts associated with the Proposed Project

VIS-2: The Proposed Project will result in the removal of a dilapidated, non-serviceable oil production structure from the viewshed and install a new series of marine bird roosting/nesting platforms.

Discussion:

Upon completion of construction activities, the pier remnant will be removed from the viewshed. In its place, four piles upon which marine bird roosting/nesting platforms are to be installed in accordance with the recommendations of the California Department of Fish and Game. The construction of the proposed roosting/nesting platforms is fully described in Section 3.4.5 of this EIR and is summarized as follows. Four driven pipe piles will support the roosting/nesting platforms. Each pile will be configured to support three trapezoidal roosting/nesting areas, each positioned at a slightly different elevation. The total roosting/nesting area accommodated on each pile will be approximately 200 square feet (60.96m). The elevation of the platforms will be above the predicted crest elevation of the 100-year wave resulting in a structural height of approximately 40 feet (12.1m) above the ocean surface. Diamond plate will be provided as the roosting/nesting surface. The upper portions of

the piles and platforms will be painted white per the CDFG. CDFG biologists and CDFG Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) marine bird specialists have reviewed the roosting/nesting platform design and spatial arrangement and the present design incorporates their recommendations. Please refer to Figure 3-12 for a plan view of a roosting/nesting area and Figure 3-13 for a relative size comparison of the remnant structure versus the roosting/nesting platforms. Figure 4.7-3 provides a visual simulation of the proposed roosting/nesting platforms.

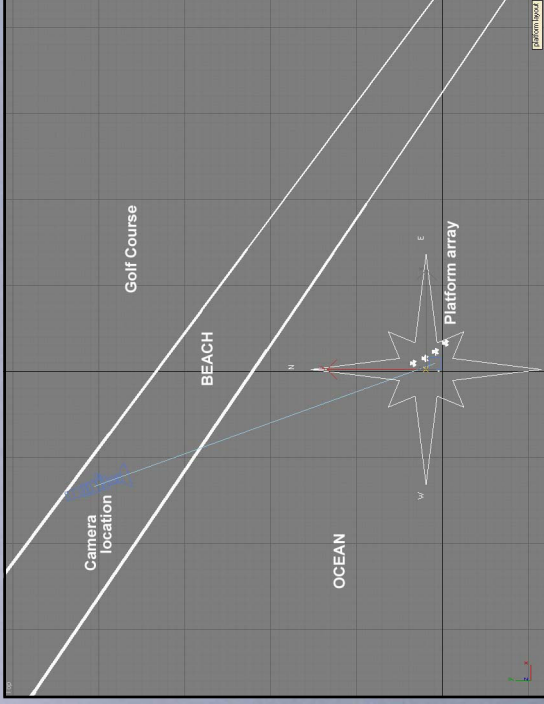
As can be seen on Figure 3-13, the proposed roosting/nesting platforms would be taller than the existing pier remnants. However, these structures would be less massive than the existing structural remnants and would be new construction. Therefore, this change in the structural elements at the site would not adversely affect the existing visual character of the area. However, due to the increased height of the proposed platforms, it is possible that distant views of the structures may be available from locations that presently have no view of the pier remnants due to existing intervening topography or vegetation. Nonetheless, the new structures would not block views nor be inconsistent with the existing character of the area in that it will preserve the ability of California brown pelicans and Brandt's cormorants to roost/nest at the same location presently used and observed by are viewers and visitors. Additionally, no night lighting or highly reflective materials are proposed that would create lighting or glare impacts.

Impact/Mitigation:

Pier removal and roosting/nesting platform construction will result in less than significant impact on the visual quality of the project area (Class 3). Therefore, no mitigation is required.



EXISTING CONDITION



LIKELY PLATFORM LAYOUT



POST-PROJECT VISUAL SIMULATION
FIGURE 4.7-3

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